

## Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 314179 TOSEC 340175

TO THE SECRETARY FROM ARA - SHLAUDEMAN

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS:     PFOR

SUBJECT:   BRIEFING MEMORANDUM: PRESIDENT FORD'S STATE-  
MENT CALLING FOR STATEHOOD FOR PUERTO RICO

THE PRESS TODAY REPORTED THAT PRESIDENT FORD WILL RECOMMEND  
TO THE INCOMING CONGRESS THAT IT ADOPT LEGISLATION TO MAKE  
PUERTO RICO A STATE. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE THOUGHT STATE-  
HOOD WOULD ENTITLE PUERTO RICANS TO THE SAME RIGHTS AND  
BENEFITS AS OTHER US CITIZENS.

THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT REPORTEDLY WAS MADE FOLLOWING  
HIS STUDY OF THE REPORT OF THE AD HOC ADVISORY GROUP ON  
PUERTO RICO, A BODY APPOINTED JOINTLY BY THE PRESIDENT AND  
THE GOVERNOR OF PUERTO RICO IN 1973. THE REPORT WAS  
SUBMITTED TO THE PRESIDENT OCTOBER 1, 1975, WITH THE  
RECOMMENDATION THAT IT BE SUBMITTED TO THE CONGRESS WITH  
HIS ENDORSEMENT.  
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THE REPORT OF THE AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE DID NOT CALL  
FOR STATEHOOD. RATHER, IT RECOMMENDED GREATER AUTONOMY  
UNDER THE EXISTING COMMONWEALTH RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
PUERTO RICO AND THE UNITED STATES. THE PRESIDENT'S STATE-  
MENT MAY THUS BE READ AS A REJECTION OF THE COMMITTEE'S

RECOMMENDATIONS.

THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT ALSO FOLLOWS THE ELECTION VICTORY IN PUERTO RICO OF THE PARTY IN FAVOR OF STATEHOOD, THE NEW PROGRESSIVE PARTY OF CARLOS ROMERO BARCELO. (THE NPP IS TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.) HOWEVER, THAT VICTORY WAS NOT A CLEAR DECISION OF THE PUERTO RICAN PEOPLE IN FAVOR OF STATEHOOD. ECONOMIC ISSUES WERE DOMINANT IN THE CAMPAIGN, AND BARCELO HAS SAID THAT HE WILL NOT SEEK STATEHOOD IMMEDIATELY.

ANY MOVE TO STATEHOOD WOULD REQUIRE NOT ONLY THE APPROVAL OF THE US CONGRESS, BUT A REFERENDUM IN PUERTO RICO. THE LAST SUCH REFERENDUM WAS HELD IN 1967, AND IN THAT VOTE THE ADVOCATES OF COMMONWEALTH STATUS GOT OVER 60P OF THE VOTE AS OPPOSED TO ONLY A LITTLE OVER 39 FOR STATEHOOD.

FROM THE DEPARTMENT'S POINT OF VIEW, THE QUESTION OF PUERTO RICO'S STATUS HAS REVOLVED AROUND CUBAN CHARGES THAT WE ARE PREVENTING PUERTO RICO FROM REALIZING ITS INDEPENDENCE. YOU WILL RECALL THAT PRESIDENT EISENHOWER IN 1953 AUTHORIZED OUR REPRESENTATIVE AT THE UN TO SAY THAT IF THE PUERTO RICAN LEGISLATURE WERE AT ANY TIME TO ADOPT A RESOLUTION IN FAVOR OF MORE COMPLETE OR EVEN ABSOLUTE INDEPENDENCE, THE PRESIDENT WOULD IMMEDIATELY RECOMMEND TO CONGRESS THAT SUCH INDEPENDENCE BE GRANTED.

IT APPEARS UNLIKELY THAT THE NPP WILL TAKE ANY IMMEDIATE ACTION AIMED AT ACHIEVING STATEHOOD. WE SUSPECT THAT EVEN

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THOUGH THE NPP WON THE ELECTION, THOSE IN FAVOR OF STATEHOOD ARE STILL IN THE MINORITY. (THE NPP GOT 48P OF THE VOTE, GOVERNOR COLON'S COMMONWEALTH PARTY GOT 46P, AND THOSE FAVORING INDEPENDENCE A LITTLE OVER 5P.)

CASTRO MAY SEEK TO INTERPRET THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT AS AN ATTEMPT TO FORCE STATEHOOD ON OUR "COLONIAL SUBJECTS" IN PUERTO RICO, THEREBY FOREVER DEPRIVING THEM OF THE INDEPENDENCE THE CUBANS ALLEGE THEY WANT. THE STATEMENT IS ALSO LIKELY TO BE THE SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE SPECULATION BY OTHER CARIBBEAN AND SOME LATIN LEADERS. IT MAY ULTIMATELY BE DISCUSSED IN THE UN'S COMMITTEE OF 24.

THE NEW GOVERNOR WILL BE INAUGURATED SUNDAY, AND I WILL BE THERE AS YOUR REPRESENTATIVE. IN RESPONSE TO ANY QUERIES ON THE QUESTION OF OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE STATUS QUESTION, I WILL NOT GO BEYOND THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT.

ROBINSON

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